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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MW](#)
SUBJECT: MONTENEGRO: SERB OPPOSITION PREPARING FOR
PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN INDEPENDENT STATE

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) Summary: President Andrija Mandic of the Serb People's Party (SNS) outlined his plans to solidify support among ethnic Serb voters in advance of the fall parliamentary elections, on a platform of decentralizing government to the local level. He readily acknowledged Montenegro's independence, and faulted Serbian PM Kostunica for first pushing the opposition into contesting the referendum, and then failing to quickly recognize Montenegro's sovereignty after the vote. Mandic listened attentively as poloff faulted Mandic's "rejection" of the referendum results in the days after the vote, but replied that he did not wish to discuss the referendum. Mandic said that the pro-Union bloc's activities contributed to stability in the referendum period, and dismissed reports of preparations to disrupt the outcome (septel) by arguing that his actions spoke louder than words. End summary.

Decentralization in An Independent Montenegro

12. (U) Poloff met with Andrija Mandic, President of the Serb People's Party (SNS), on June 15. Mandic argued that the strong pro-Union turnout on May 21 showed that a Serb nationalist coalition could do well in republic parliamentary elections, due this fall. Acknowledging the independence of Montenegro, Mandic said he and the SNS would not follow the example of ethnic Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, but would instead seek to protect the interests of ethnic Serbs within the legal and democratic framework of a post-State Union republic. He said the core plank of the SNS campaign would be decentralization of government functions, to allow municipalities a greater say in the staffing and delivery of public services, emphasizing police and education. He readily agreed that his objective could make him and for example Albanians seeking greater autonomy for Tuzi, the proverbial "strange bedfellows."

Disappointment in Serbian PM Kostunica

13. (SBU) Mandic said his decision for SNS to enter the referendum campaign was strongly influenced by a December conversation in Belgrade with Serbian PM Kostunica. Mandic said that he was disappointed that Kostunica has so far failed to concur in recognition of Montenegro's independence, after setting the stage for the referendum to occur. Mandic added that if Belgrade was really interested in protecting the interests of Serbs in Montenegro, the way to do that was to establish a Serb embassy, and (tongue

only somewhat in cheek), "maybe four or five consulates."

Mandic Sheds Criticism

¶4. (SBU) Poloff underscored USG interest in a viable Montenegrin democracy, including a democratic opposition. Poloff reiterated that democracy means playing by the rules, and accepting the outcome of a free and fair vote and referendum process, faulting Mandic's public "rejection" of the referendum results when announced by Ambassador Lipka (Slovakia), the chair of the Republic Referendum Commission. Mandic reiterated that he did not wish to discuss the referendum, and that he accepted that Montenegro is now independent.

Public Security Issues during the Referendum

¶5. (SBU) Poloff stressed that the USG had received apparently reliable reports that, despite the solid calm and peaceful atmosphere that pervaded the campaign and vote, that the SNS had taken steps to reject, through undemocratic means, the outcome of the referendum (septel). Mandic urged that the reports be discounted, stressing the near total lack of violent confrontation throughout the campaign, the vote, and its aftermath. Mandic stated that the pro-Union bloc's actions were the single largest contributor to the peaceful outcome. Comment: Post is of the view that the credit belongs, in much greater degree, to Socialist People's Party (SNP) president Predrag Bulatovic, than to Mandic. End comment.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Mandic is an engaging, well-spoken politician. He is very conscious of his audience, and shapes his words

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accordingly. His stated commitment to a peaceful, multi-ethnic, democratic and independent Montenegro can be used a benchmark, and the USG would do well to hold him to the standard that he has set for himself. End comment.

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